

Professor the Hon Louis CHA

Citation

Professor Louis Cha is one man with four ideals and three lives — all of them gloriously realized or lived to the full. His life is the envy of most intellectuals. He is the creator of the fictional world of martial arts chivalry, and the founder of a globally influential newspaper. He provides both the avenues of escape and the platform for active social engagement. Underneath it all is an abiding reverence for history and culture, for which he has been the ageless pursuer.

From the age of reason, Prof Cha's life has been anchored by goals. In his salad days, he set himself four personal objectives: to arm himself with indispensable knowledge or skills through intensive studies; to engage in undertakings that are personally and socially beneficial; to live a life of easy comfort in his twilight years without money worries; and to create a socially significant legacy that will thrive independently of his own existence. We have all set goals or articulated dreams, but few of us have the ferocity of will and the supreme self-belief to live a planned life the way Prof Cha has.

In living his scripted life, Prof Cha has, in spectacular fashion, shattered a long-standing curse that afflicts nearly every Chinese man of letters, that he is doomed to a life of poverty and marginality. His financial success has provided the cushion for a life of comfort even before pushing middle age. His social standing catapulted him into a prominent role as a member of the Drafting Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's Basic Law.

We honor him as Louis Cha, but we love him as Jin Yong. Of his three incarnations, he considers himself, first and foremost, a man of literature. As the uncrowned king of the wuxia genre, the romance of the martial arts, his stories play out authentically on a large historical canvas. More than a hundred million copies of his books have been sold world-wide. His readership spans the globe, cutting across national and social groupings from Chinese state leaders, American college professors to store clerks, from the high-brow to the low-brow. He is everybody's favorite Chinese novelist. Few can resist the escapist charms of his imaginary world.

His novels are populated by a cast of fictional characters who now walk, talk and breathe among us. They exist socially in our conversations and cinematically in our tickled minds. He has expanded our lexicon and stretched our imaginations.

Some say that Prof Cha has the Midas touch rare for a man of letters. Everything he touches has turned to gold. He fathered the Chinese daily newspaper *Ming Pao* which has been dubbed "the intellectual's newspaper". Though the torch has been passed to a new generation of journalists, this paper continues to exert an influence on public opinion far beyond its circulation numbers. Now also published in North America, it is the daily bread of Chinese intellectuals worldwide, regardless of political persuasion. It shines a light on many vital aspects of modern day China for the benefit of all who care about its destiny. On

matters concerning the past, present and future of an ancient culture now undergoing massive rejuvenation his is the voice of authority.

Though not trained as a historian, he has the historian's eye and the skeptic's mind. He relishes debunking historical myths and fallacies, taking advantage of fresh archeological finds as soon as they are unearthed.

In doing so, he not only defies historical orthodoxy, he also defies biology. In the seasons of life, Prof Cha's life has no winter. At the luminous age of 81, he enrolled himself in a Master's Degree program in an intensive on-campus study of the Tang Dynasty at Cambridge University which had already conferred upon him an honorary doctorate, its highest accolade. He completed the program in May this year, taking just 18 months in a two-year program. He is now itching to get going on a 3-year PhD program, and plans to finish it in two.

Asked why he chose to go to Cambridge, he said its currency is originality. It eggs its students on to ask unasked questions. As a member of the human race, he believes that his first duty is to break new grounds in knowledge. He has no use for education or scholarship which busies itself with recycling existing knowledge. He goes where the pursuit of knowledge is hottest.

Day to day, a big chunk of his time is consumed in voracious reading. Life-long learning has been bandied about in Hong Kong in recent years. Prof Cha lives it. For him, a life without learning is a life without meaning. To him, learning is quite simply the very essence of living.

Armed with only his prodigious intellect, Prof Cha may not be known for his physical bravery,

but at the height of the Cultural Revolution in 1967, he was prepared to lay down his life in defense of China's culture against the senseless onslaught of mob irrationality and destructiveness. He calmly pledged to consecrate his life to the protection of the cultural heritage of his beloved country.

Prof Cha's legacy is assured. His perennially popular novels and the much-respected newspaper form part of this assurance. But another part of his intangible legacy is equally vital. Late in the afternoon, on a late summer's day, as the sun hovers on the horizon beyond his breathtaking harbor view office, this legacy comes into view as Prof Cha appears, wrinkle-free, and larger than life. There is passion in his speech and fire in his belly, as he keeps his eye on the future of knowledge. He does not intend to "go gently into the good night". Life may be finite, but not his burning desire for a new day of learning.

What comes after Prof Cha's PhD? We can only wait. After all, by then, he will only be 85.

Mr Chancellor, on behalf of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, I have the honor to present to you Prof Louis Cha Liang-yung, author and legendary journalist, for the award of Doctor of Letters *honoris causa*.